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SUBJECT: PDAS VOLKER HEARS FRENCH VIEWS ON AFRICA

REF: A. PARIS 6434 B. PARIS 6887

Classified By: Political Minister Counselor Josiah B. Rosenblatt. Reas

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¶1. (C) SUMMARY AND ACTION REQUESTS: EUR PDAS Volker met AF PDAS-Equivalent Barbier and DAS-Equivalent Le Gal October 6 to discuss areas of converging interest in Africa. Barbier struck a positive note of appreciation for ongoing cooperation and consultations. France shared U.S. views on Sudan, including Darfur, and wished to be helpful. Barbier said there was great interest in the notional U.S. suggestion for a Darfur conference aiming to build rebel cohesion. AMIS, she thought, would need to transition into a UN operation by summer 2006, but on terms acceptable to the African Union. She said European partners had informed Paris of U.S. plans for an 10/12 D.C. meeting on planning for the future of AMIS, apparently restricted to the Troika-plus. She said France would like to attend, if invited. Barbier also sketched French plans for the military reorganization of African bases and its relationship to French-EU capacity building through RECAMP.

¶2. (C) ACTION REQUESTS:

-- Please provide guidance on the French request to participate in the 10/12 meeting in D.C. on planning for the future of AMIS.

-- Please provide guidance to share with the Quai d'Orsay on thinking for a notional Darfur conference in the near term.

END SUMMARY AND ACTION REQUESTS

¶3. (U) EUR PDAS Volker and AF PDAS-Equivalent Elisabeth Barbier met October 6 to discuss areas of converging interests in Africa. AF DAS-equivalent for East Africa Helene Le Gal and Sudan/Ethiopia/Eritrea Desk Officer Jeremie Robert also participated on the French side, as well as Political Minister Counselor Rosenblatt, Africa Watcher and visiting EUR/WE France Desk Officer Susan Ball. AF A/S-equivalent Bruno Joubert was absent on travel, but Barbier expressed appreciation on his behalf for recent Washington meetings, as well as for continuing cooperation and consultations, noting in particular the digital video conferences on DRC and Mauritania.

Sudan / Darfur

¶4. (C) On Sudan, Barbier emphasized Joubert's Washington exchanges were especially valuable and indicated a broad convergence of views. France, like the U.S., was very concerned by Darfur, particularly because of the impact on Chad, which she described as "very unhappy." France, Barbier claimed, had been in the vanguard of those sounding the alarm, long before ministerial visits to the region became routine, even "a la mode." The fallout of John Garang's death could have been worse, she remarked; the North-South process, though slowed, remained on track, even if SPLM representation in the Government of National Unity was less significant than hoped. However, Salva Kir, Garang's successor as First Vice President, was not taking much interest in resolving Darfur, she regretted.

¶5. (C) Barbier emphasized Joubert's interest in follow-up on a U.S. suggestion for a conference on Darfur aiming to create more cohesion among rebel factions. France would be supportive, she said, however the U.S. wanted to proceed and whatever venue the U.S. should elect, including Chad. The Abuja Peace Process was stalling; the SLM -- especially Mini Minawi -- was a "big spoiler." France, like the U.S., had sought to apply pressure to the SLM, both directly and indirectly through Chad, but without tangible results (Ref). It may be time to threaten sanctions under Resolution 1591 against individuals impeding the peace process. Stern public discourse was needed by all, she said, given the worsening situation on the ground. Le Gal lamented the failure at the Abuja talks even to reinforce and reiterate the ceasefire, a lapse that could directly impact on AMIS forces. Security matters should take priority, she said, over deliberations on wealth and power sharing.

16. (C) Barbier said France lacked specific information on the cross-border attacks into Chad. Such attacks were not infrequent, she added; their attribution to "Janjaweed" was imprecise. Chad's diplomatic retaliation against Sudan was a significant reaction. Barbier speculated on "one way of reading" the incident involving Chad's historically rocky -- even if recently outwardly calm -- relationship with Libya. She wondered if Khartoum had been unsettled by Chad's recent reconciliation with the JEM, which has close links to Libya, and whether the cross-border attack was meant as a reminder that N'djamena must not neglect its Eastern neighbor. (Note: Le Gal called attention in a previous meeting with Africa Watcher to Deby's September meetings with Qadhafi. Ref B.)

17. (C) Barbier said there were limits to the effectiveness of AMIS, because AU forces lack the means to "cover enough of Darfur." More AU troops meant ever more donor money and she discounted the likelihood of AMIS ever growing to 12,000. AU Chairperson Konare and Commissioner Djinnit were talking opening, she said, of possibly blue-hatting AMIS. However, the AU hasn't yet decided, according to Konare, a point that Barbier underscored as a salient reminder that the AU would protect its prerogatives. In the event of blue-hatting, "AMIS has to be seen as an African success," not as "a retreat." Le Gal, who deemed June 2006 a likely target for the transition to a UN operation, noted that \$200 million would still be necessary to cover interim costs. She understood the U.S. might provide \$100 million and she expected the EU would furnish the remainder.

Joint Petroleum Interests in Sudan?

18. (SBU) Barbier suggested a further convergence in French and U.S. interests in the region, namely ensuring that Sudan abides by its earlier internal agreements on petroleum exploration and development. She drew attention to the partnership between the Marathon Oil Company and Total in Sudan.

African Capacity Building

19. (C) At PDAS Volker's request, Barbier elaborated on reports of a possible French military reorganization in Africa and the relation to the French RECAMP program for capacity building in Africa. Cautioning no official decision had yet been taken, Barbier confirmed that France planned to reorient its military presence around core bases in Djibouti, Senegal and Gabon, each of which would provide military capacity training and logistical support to regional African organizations. The rank for the commander in Dakar Senegal and Libreville, Gabon would rise from Colonel to Brigadier General, she said. She noted that France had been trying to extend RECAMP's reach beyond West Africa, and had even begun training programs in English. Such capacity training conformed to international goals articulated during the U.S. G-8 presidency.

10. (C) Noting U.S. initiatives through GPOI and ACOTA, PDAS Volker asked where Barbier saw possibilities of complementarity, for instance through NATO. Barbier commented that Africa required such a degree of assistance that many different solutions should be tried; establishing training centers in Africa seemed the most cost-effective approach. The core French bases would be training platforms, Barbier said, "focal points" for coordination with notional African Union standby forces. (Note: AF "Crisis Management" Director Franois-Xavier Leger told Africa Watcher October 5 that the French bases would include RECAMP training cells, that senior African Union and regional military officials would be seconded to the bases, as would EU officers. RECAMP would take on an increasingly EU signature, Leger suggested. He added that the reason for promoting the base commanders to brigadier general was simply to ensure parity of rank with senior Africans.) The Abidjan base in Cote d'Ivoire was a different category, she said, and its life-cycle was tied now to Operation Licorne and UNOCI. The military base on the French territory of Reunion would, however, play a supporting role in the reorganization and serve to coordinate with SADC.

Cote d'Ivoire

11. (C) On Cote d'Ivoire, Barbier offered no specific plan of action. France was watching ongoing African Union deliberations carefully. Concerted international pressure would be imperative to facilitate a transition to "free, fair and proper" elections, possibly within 6-8 months. France would look for U.S. help, she said, in formulating appropriate UNSC action. Barbier noted that Senegal and Ghana -- specifically Ghana President Kufuor who visited

France 10/3-10/6 -- were each calling for a stronger UN force, a proposal she recognized would likely not be well-received by the U.S. She mentioned that French troops assigned to Operation Licorne in support of UNOCI would remain in Cote d'Ivoire so long as the UN retained its mandate and there is AU support.

Other African Asides

¶12. (C) While maintaining that cooperation between the U.S. and France in Africa was positive overall, Barbier volunteered there was disagreement on how to proceed on Zimbabwe, stressing however that France was not pro-Mugabe, just not convinced that direct confrontation would open "a way out of this big black hole." On Liberia, Barbier deferred explicitly to the U.S. lead. However, there was a disconnect, she suggested, with certain parties in the U.S. Congress on how to pursue former Liberian President Charles Taylor in Nigeria. France certainly agreed on the need for justice, she stressed. However, President Obasanjo should have a say on the timing. On DRC and Mauritania, Barbier expressed appreciation for past consultations by digital video conferences. Barbier concluded the meeting with a plea for attention to the Central African Republic, a "forgotten crisis" which she described as "our pet project." She suggested the U.S. could exert helpful influence on international financial institutions.

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